

Daresalam

105 minutes, 2000, Chad, Burkina Faso, and France

California Newsreel

Director: Issa Serge Coelo

in Arabic and French with English subtitles

For viewers with limited information about the film, trying to guess *Daresalam's* location can be diverting. The nation-state that is the locus of contestation for the film's protagonists is fictional, yet it is clearly set in the Sahel. The scenery has some resemblances to Mali and most especially to Chad, where it was filmed. Perhaps because of the title, Blockbuster Online misidentified the setting as Tanzania; the mixture of Arabic and French and the landscape and costumes quickly debunk that assertion.

The film is intended as a composite of sorts. It seems to derive much from Chadian history and to be loosely related to events elsewhere in Francophone Africa as well. According to the publisher there are even references to Che Guevara's Bolivian experiences, but many viewers may be unaware of the plot's parallels to figures like Guevara and Thomas Sankara.

An early concern about glorifying armed struggle was assuaged by the later parts of the film highlighting the corrupting and corrosive influences of armed conflicts and war. The film underlines how a seemingly "just war" (a concept this reviewer finds highly dubious) can ultimately be detrimental and divisive, even for former close comrades. One hopes for a belated sequel examining more effective, constructive alternatives to violent attempts to end injustices and seek redress. A loosely historical drama derived from successful nonviolent movements and set elsewhere could be a valuable work.

Given its synthetic, referential nature, *Daresalam* is not a scholarly or educational work, but it has potential appeal for a variety of viewers. On a very general level, it provides some insight into its topic and particularly the Chadian civil war during the early Hissène Habré era. Its appeal, however, is primarily artistic. The cinematography is engaging with majestic landscapes, including imposing mountains, desert rock art, and oases. One's attention is also held by dramatic interludes of events like rebel festivals with racing camels, guns firing into the air, ululation, and drumming. Perhaps the most impressive element is the evocative visual sketches that provide transitions between most scenes. The film has a pensive, moody atmosphere and feel.

The soundtrack is also quite interesting with a range of compositions spanning fairly traditional pieces with drumming or kora to 1970s acid rock flavored guitar solos that evoke that indefinable sound blend of northern Mali, desert blues, Mississippi Delta, and Jimi Hendrix found on many Mamadou et Mariam albums. This short film is recommended as a slightly educational and quite entertaining piece that has a good message.

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